(b) Iran-India gas pipeline was among the issues that figured during the joint press conference.

(c) and (d) The Joint Communique issued after the visit of President Khatami to Pakistan stated that bilateral, regional and global issues, including Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq were discussed between the two sides.

(e) No, Sir. However, during the joint press conference, Iranian President expressed hope that both India and Pakistan would be able to resolve their problems peacefully through reasoning and justice. Pakistan and Iran also called for peaceful resolution of all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan.

(f) India's position on talks with Pakistan is widely known. Pakistan must end its sponsorship of cross-border terrorism directed against India for talks to be meaningfuls.

Policy regarding NRIs

†995. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any "Pravasi" policy;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (c) The Government recognizes the important role Pravasi Bharatiyas can play in strengthening India's relations with the countries of their settlement. It is, therefore, Government's policy to engage Pravasi Bharatiyas in a constructive and mutually beneficial manner. A High Level Committee was constituted to recommend a broad but flexible policy framework to attain this objective. The Committee made a number of wide ranging recommendations falling under the jurisdiction of various Ministries, State Governments and other agencies. Some recommendations like Revised PIO Card Scheme, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards have already been implemented by the Government. Other recommendations were sent to the concerned Ministries/Departments of the Government

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

of India and State Governments for examination and decision on their implementation.

Haj pilgrimage

996. SHRI SHAHID SIDDIQUI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indians that went for Haj this year;

(b) out of them how many made the pilgrimage through the Haj Committee; and

(c) how many people went to Makkah through private tour operators?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) 1,16,078 Indians went for Haj this year.

(b) 69,795 pilgrims went for Haj through the Haj Committee.

(c) 46,283 pilgrims visited Makkah through Private Tour Operators including Indian nationals resident in third countries.

Committee for foolproof passport system

997. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the terrorists are misusing passports after procuring them under false names;

(b) whether it is also a fact that a committee to suggest ways to streamline and making the passport a foolproof system was recently appointed;

(c) if so, what are its recommendations; and

(d) by when these are likely to be implemented?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes. There have been a few cases of terrorists fraudulently obtaining passports under false names.

(b) A Committee was set up in 1987 to look into the question of passport forgeries and advise on ways and means to eliminate forgery of